

ROMILLY JAMES HEALD JENKINS

(1907–1969)

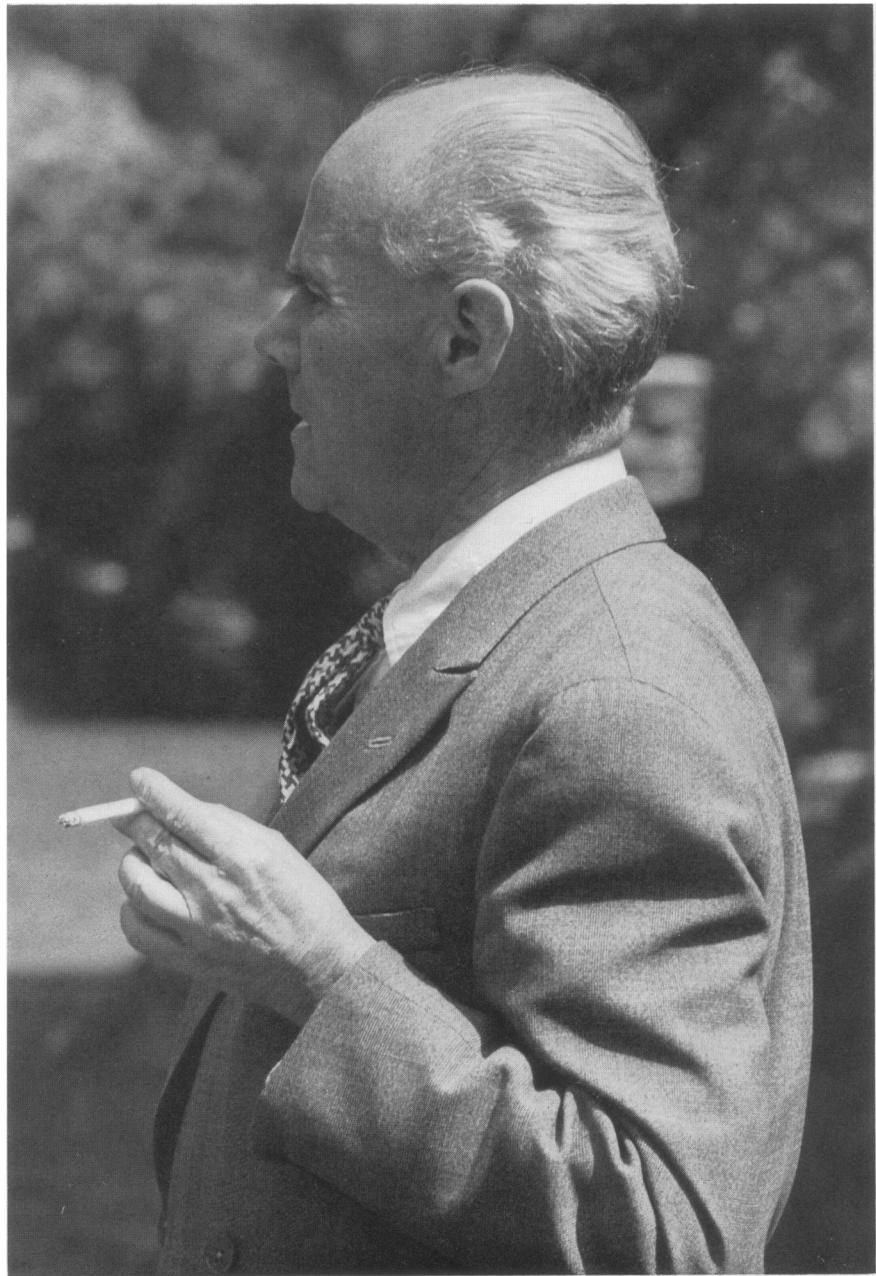
ON September 30, 1969 Dumbarton Oaks sustained a grave loss in the death of its Director of Studies, Romilly Jenkins.

The main facts of Jenkins' career are quickly told. Born in 1907 at Hitchin, Herts., England, he was educated at the Leys School and at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, graduating in 1929 as Chancellor's Classical Medallist. From 1930 to 1934 he was a student at the British School at Athens, and for many years thereafter remained closely associated with the affairs of that institution, being named to the Board of the Managing Committee in 1936, a Trustee in 1948, and serving as Chairman of the Managing Committee from 1951 to 1958. In 1936 Jenkins was appointed Lewis Gibson Lecturer in Modern Greek at Cambridge University, a position he held until 1946; during the War years, however, he worked for the British Foreign Service. Named in 1946 to the Koraës Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature at King's College, University of London, he continued in that capacity until 1960, acting concurrently as honorary lecturer in Classical Archaeology. In 1960 Jenkins moved permanently to the United States as Professor of Byzantine History and Literature at Dumbarton Oaks. He remained in this position until his death, serving also since 1967 as Director of Studies. In short, a straight and distinguished academic career.

As for his spiritual progress, his *πνευματική πορεία* (to borrow the title of a book by his friend George Theotokas), that was a rather more complex matter. At first, everything went normally. The study of the ancient authors at Cambridge led Jenkins to classical archaeology of the archaic period. I am not qualified to judge his contribution to this domain; suffice it to say that his *Dedalica*, in which he attempted for the first time a stylistic classification of the so-called Dedalic sculpture of the seventh century B.C., was very well received, and that a critic as severe as Charles Picard congratulated the author on the "précision minutieuse, édifiante de ses analyses."¹

A few years later, however, Jenkins abandoned the professional pursuit of classical archaeology and turned to modern Greece. It is true that in later years, when he occupied the Koraës Chair in London, he gave a regular course

¹ *Revue des études grecques*, 50 (1937), 159.



of lectures on classical sculpture, this being paradoxically the only formal teaching he did at the time. More significant is the fact that the Greek classics left on Jenkins an indelible imprint inasmuch as they provided a standard of good taste and elegant diction. His scholarly interests, however, had veered in another direction.

The shift from ancient to modern Greece was not, of course, alien to the traditions of the British School at Athens: it is sufficient to recall the names of some of his eminent predecessors in that institution—R. M. Dawkins, F. W. Hasluck, J. C. Lawson. And yet, their respective cases were not precisely parallel. Dawkins, Hasluck, and Lawson were essentially folklorists who devoted their studies to the survival of ancient customs, beliefs, and, in the case of Dawkins, language among the simple folk—a survival that was somehow taken for granted without much consideration of the two millennia that lay in between. Jenkins, on the other hand, was attracted by the polite literature of modern Greece, a literature that is thoroughly European and cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as genetically descended from the Greek classics.

Jenkins' chief contribution to the study of modern Greek letters is his book on Dionysios Solomós (1940). It is presented with characteristic modesty ("not a formal biography, but only the slightest of sketches") and the very considerable scholarship that lies behind it is entirely camouflaged (no footnotes, not even a bibliography). Now, the remarkable thing about this book—and it remains an excellent book even if a good deal of new information on Solomós has become available since—is that it required an apparatus of knowledge that was entirely foreign to the classical scholar. For Solomós was a figure of Italian Romanticism, explainable as a poet only in terms of the contemporary European scene. This was clearly seen by Jenkins who laid the stresses where they were due and who, for all his enthusiasm, was able to avoid the usual pitfalls of the classical scholar: there are no spurious comparisons here with Pindar or Euripides, no evocations of the eternal spirit of Hellenism. We may also note the very keen sense of literary criticism that this book exhibits, the author's love of demotic Greek and, ironically, his contempt for the Byzantine tradition. One dictum is worth quoting: "The Byzantine Empire remains almost the unique example of a highly civilized state, lasting for more than a millennium, which produced hardly any educated writing which can be read with pleasure for its literary merit alone."

Twenty years later Jenkins wrote another book on a modern Greek theme, *The Dilessi Murders*. Outwardly, this is a tale of assassination, intrigue, and detection, and an engrossing tale it is, too. That it is based on a mass of previously unexploited material, that it subsumes an exhaustive familiarity with Greek and British politics in the nineteenth century, are facts that hardly obtrude themselves on the reader, so effortlessly does the narrative run. In this respect *The Dilessi Murders* resembles the *Solomós*. What distinguishes the later book, however, is its changed attitude toward the Greece of the last century. Any candid reader will admit that this attitude is scrupulously fair;

yet Jenkins does not gloss over the appalling corruption and savagery of manners that prevailed in the Kingdom of the Hellenes a hundred years ago. What particularly concerns the author is the intellectual dishonesty of the Greeks of the time—the gap between truth and self-delusion, between truth and “ethnic” truth. The cause of this phenomenon he finds in the Byzantine heritage of Greece masquerading in nationalist dress. Once again, Byzantium appears as the villain.

It was between the *Solomós* and *The Dilessi Murders*, in the period immediately after the Second World War, that Jenkins addressed himself to Byzantium. He did not “convert” to Byzantium as did many of his gifted contemporaries who, being for the most part ignorant of the Greek tongue, managed to discover in mediaeval Constantinople some kind of religious fulfillment, aesthetic beauty, and even the “joyous life” (this singularly inappropriate phrase is due to Robert Byron). Jenkins focused his attention on the period of the Empire’s mediaeval apogee, the ninth and tenth centuries, and went straight to the original sources. The fruit of his studies was the commented edition and translation of the *De administrando imperio*, a monumental collaborative work which he edited and to which he was the principal contributor. At the same time he began writing a series of brilliant articles in which he sought to resolve the numerous historical puzzles of the period. Few contributions to Byzantine studies can rival the detective skill and mastery of the sources which Jenkins applied to the flight of Samonas, the tetragamy of Leo VI, the career of Nicetas David Paphlago, the chronology of the Logothete’s Chronicle. Some of the best of these articles—and especial mention should be made of “The Classical Background of the *Scriptores post Theophanem*”—appeared in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*. It is a tribute to the author’s skill that at times his reconstruction of events was almost too ingenious.

Far from finding in Byzantium any trace of the “joyous life,” Jenkins discovered instead a gloomy and intolerant despotism. The dead hand of orthodoxy lay on every department of life. In literature, rhetoric and pedantry reigned supreme, while all poetic feeling was banished. How could the genius of ancient Greece have come to this sorry pass? The answer seemed to be that the ancient Greeks had long been defunct; that Byzantium was a hodge-podge of half-civilized peoples and barbarians, a *colluvies gentium*, united by the imperial idea, the Orthodox faith, and a bastard form of the Greek language; in short, not the continuation, but the antithesis of ancient Greece. One is reminded of Henri Grégoire’s judgment of J. B. Bury, “fidèle scientifiquement à un Empire qu’il aurait dû détester, et dont certainement il n’a jamais compris l’âme.”² And yet, it would be unjust to say that Jenkins did not understand the “soul” of Byzantium—he understood it all too well, but did not find it congenial.

Having gone so far, Jenkins went one step further. As others before him, he saw that Byzantium was, on the one hand, the direct ancestor of Russian absolutism, both Czarist and Communist, and, on the other, of nearly every-

² *Byzantium*, 5 (1929/30), 737.

thing that he found objectionable in modern Greece, perhaps even in the modern world. In this conclusion he had been anticipated by the great German scholar Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer, and to him he proceeded to pay homage in his two famous lectures *Byzantium and Byzantinism*. The criticism to which he was subjected in this connection, while not as intense as in the case of Fallmerayer (times have changed a little) was nevertheless sufficiently loud, but Jenkins took it all in good spirit.

In the last few years of his life Jenkins was devoting the greater part of his effort (progressively eroded as it was by his administrative duties) to the edition of the Letters of the Patriarch Nicholas I Mysticus, an edition that he planned along the same lines as that of the *De administrando imperio*. Fortunately, he managed to complete the first volume which includes the collection of 163 letters of *codex Patmiacus* 178, and this will soon go to press with the collaboration of Professor L. G. Westerink. It is greatly to be regretted that volume two, which was to include a historical commentary, was not written. Another unfinished work, concerned with the opuscule *The Peace with Bulgaria* (cf. Bibliography, article No. 48), was well advanced and, we hope, will shortly be published with the generous help of Professor Ivan Dujčev. Jenkins was also meditating a book on the reign of Leo VI, which he knew better than anyone else, and a book on the Greek Revolution of 1821, which he came to view as an internecine struggle between Albanians. The latter would certainly have generated a lively controversy.

In paying tribute to Romilly Jenkins, one cannot forget to mention the elegance of his English style, an elegance that may strike us today as being a little old-fashioned, but all the more remarkable in this day of Ph. D. plodders. Few Byzantinists of this century have written so eloquently and wittily. Norman Baynes was of this company; so—allowing for a completely different temperament—was Henri Grégoire. It is among such *coryphaei* of our studies that Jenkins has his place.

CYRIL MANGO

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